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PROGRAM.....YOUNG FOLKS PROGRAM

RELEASE Fri. Oct. 21, 1927.

119 32
9-32
No. 2. A Potato Story.

RECEIVED
OCT 12 1927
U.S. Department of Agriculture
(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

ANNOUNCEMENT: Each Friday Uncle Abe of the Department of Agriculture visits his little nephews, Jim and Sonny. Uncle Abe is full of stories. I expected to catch him with Jim, but I don't see any sign of them. They must be in the Dining room. I believe I hear them in there now. Let's go in.

UNCLE ABE: Well, Jim, the rest of the folks are away. I guess we'll have all this good food to ourselves.

JIM: I'm sure hungry!

UNCLE ABE: Will you have some spinach?

JIM: No, thanks.

UNCLE ABE: What's the matter? Don't you know you should eat some green vegetables. Spinach is full of vitamins. It will help make you grow and give you a good appetite.

JIM: But I don't like it, Uncle Abe.

UNCLE ABE: That's because you don't know what's good for you. I'll just eat all this spinach myself. Will you have some potatoes?

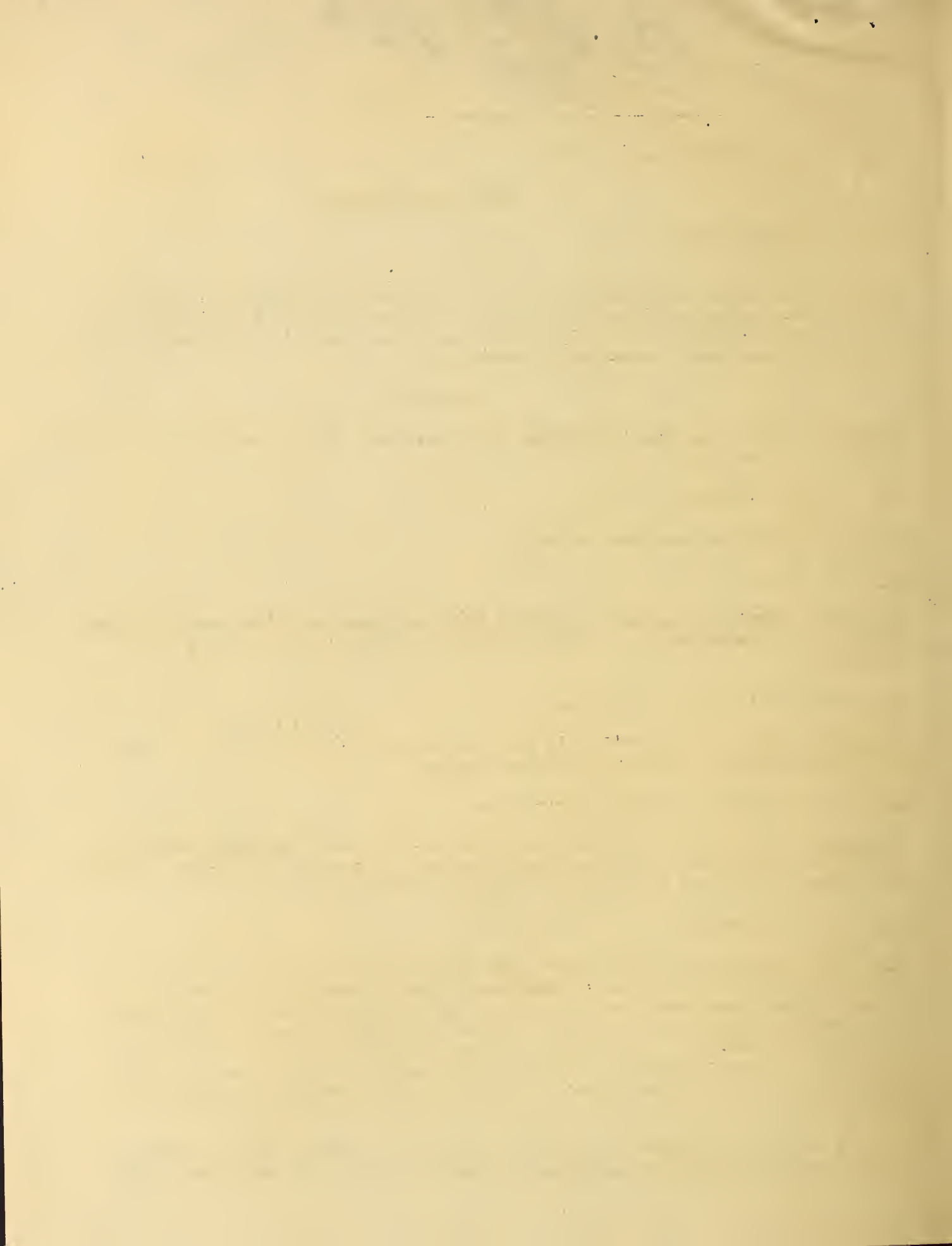
JIM: Sure. I like potatoes. They're good.

UNCLE ABE: That's funny. You know, a lot of people used to be about potatoes like you are about spinach. They didn't like potatoes, or thought they didn't. Did you ever hear about how the French people learned to like potatoes?

JIM: Tell me about it.

UNCLE ABE: After potatoes were taken from South America to Europe, it was a long time before they were grown much. What were grown in Germany and France were used to feed cattle. Some very poor people ate them when they couldn't get anything else, but many others preferred to go hungry. The King of Prussia wanted his people to plant potatoes. He thought they would be a good thing to have, in case other crops failed. He ordered them to plant potatoes. He threatened to cut off their noses and ears if they refused. Still the people regarded potatoes as fit only for cattle.

A little later there was a big war. Among the French prisoners captured by the Germans was a certain French chemist. The war kept up and the French chemist



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and kept prisoner for five years. The Germans fed their prisoners the despised potatoes. But the French chemist learned to like them. He found that they were fine food.

Well, when he got out of prison, he went back to France and began talking potatoes. But people just laughed at him. That is, they laughed at him, then they were not made too angry to laugh. They didn't like the idea of eating this cattle feed. The French chemist wrote a book about the value of potatoes. But a lot of supposedly wise men disagreed with him. Then he hit on a scheme to make the French people like potatoes---- It was a beautiful scheme.

JIM: What did he do, Uncle Abe?

UNCLE ABE: You want to understand, about this time crops were pretty bad. War and failure of the grain crop, made it important to have some good food crop to feed the poor people. A prize was offered for a food crop to take the place of grain.

JIM: How about that scheme? What did the French chemist do then?

UNCLE ABE: He gave a big dinner. Among his guests were a number of great men. Benjamin Franklin was in France then trying to get the French to help the American Revolution. He was one of the greatest men in the world at that time. Potatoes were served several ways at the dinner, which people heard about because of the great men who were there. It was a big advertisement for potatoes.

But still most people thought that potatoes were fit only for cattle. Some even said that while it might not hurt the people to eat them, potatoes would ruin the ground in which they were planted. Then the French chemist and King Louis XVI planned another scheme.

The King allowed the chemist to plant potatoes on a sandy waste where most everybody thought nothing would grow. Pretty soon, the potato vines covered the place. Then the French chemist pretended that he was scared people would tear up the vines because he wanted them to eat what they considered cattle feed. The King gave him soldiers to guard his big potato patch.

That attracted attention. Soldiers guarding a garden! People began to wonder if the potato wasn't more valuable than they had thought. But the soldiers were taken away at night. The next day, they were back on guard. Every day they guarded.

Then came the King's big holiday. The King had a big reception. The French chemist presented the King and Queen Marie Antoinette a bouquet of potato blossoms. The King and Queen ate potatoes. The King put the potato blossom in the lapel of his coat. The Queen wore potato blossoms in her hair. Then all Paris began to talk and think potatoes. They besieged the French chemist for blossoms to wear as the King and Queen did. And remember what I said about those soldiers guarding the potato patch?

JIM: Yes. You said they guarded in the day time. It looks like to me, he would have had them guard at night too.

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UNCLE ABE: That's just the point. Just as the French chemist expected, when the people saw the King thought potatoes valuable for himself, a mob raided the un-guarded potato patch at night. The people dug up the potatoes and carried them back to their own homes and gardens. Ever since then, potatoes have been popular in France. The French people tried potatoes and found them good.

JIM: People in this country ate them all the time, didn't they?

UNCLE ABE: No. We didn't have potatoes until they were brought from Ireland in 1719. As late as 1740, some men refused to work where they had to eat potatoes. We found out better too.

JIM: Well, Uncle Abe.

UNCLE ABE: Yes. What is it?

JIM: Can I have a little of your spinach, Uncle Abe?

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